

Fightback

February 2014

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

**"The People Shall Govern!"
Nelson Mandela
& capitalist distortion**

**Catholic Church:
Is Francis a "Red Pope"?**

Inequality will be the issue for 2014

A young migrant woman's experience of work in NZ

Deep sea drilling: The spirit of Mururoa?

\$2

ISSN 1177-074

Publication information

Becoming a sustaining subscriber

Subscriptions to *Fightback* are available for \$20 a year, this covers the costs of printing and postage. At present the writing, proof reading, layout, and distribution is all done on a volunteer basis. To make this publication sustainable long term we are asking for people to consider becoming 'Sustaining subscribers' by pledging a monthly amount to *Fightback* (suggested \$10). Sustaining subscribers will be send a free copy of each of our pamphlets to thank them for their extra support. The name of the magazine will change to *Fightback*, but current subscriptions will remain unaltered.

To start your sustaining subscription set up an automatic payment to 38-9002-0817250-00 with your name in the particulars and 'Sustain' in the code and email your name and address to byronccclark@gmail.com

Get Fightback each month

Within NZ: \$20 for one year (11 issues) or \$40 for two years (22 issues)

Rest of the World: \$40 for one year or \$80 for two years

Send details and payments to:

Fightback, PO Box 10282

Dominion Rd, Auckland

or

Bank transfer:

38-9002-0817250-01

Table of Contents

- | | |
|----|---|
| 3 | Editorial |
| 4 | Fightback 2014 summer conference (report) |
| 5 | Eating disorders—capitalism and patriarchy's fault! |
| 7 | A young migrant woman's experience of work in NZ |
| 10 | 300 hotel workers strike in Fiji |
| 11 | Deep sea drilling: The spirit of Mururoa? |
| 13 | "The People Shall Govern!" Nelson Mandela and capitalist distortion |
| 18 | Catholic Church: Is Francis a "Red Pope"? |
| 21 | Inequality will be the issue for 2014 |

Donations and bequeathments

Fightback is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous.) Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in Fightback from time to time.

Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Welcome to the February 2014 issue of Fightback, monthly magazine of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ).

Established in February 2013, Fightback is now entering its second year. While the group may seem modest, we believe that a combination of community and working-class forces is necessary to overturning this system. With our publication, and with our wider work, we aim to play a critical role in these struggles.

Mike Treen, Unite Union General Secretary, argued in a special feature on the Daily Blog (now Aotearoa/NZ's most read left-wing blog) that "inequality will be the key issue for 2014" (reprinted p21-24). Treen argues, "there can be no lasting attack on inequality without also attacking its source," an exploitative capitalist system. While also conducting education, debate and reflection, Fightback will continue to play an active role in class struggle over the next year.

Over a protracted capitalist crisis, in the wake of global upsurges in Europe, North America and the Arab world, with even many capitalist thinkers reflecting on the failure of economic orthodoxy, and with a Pope emphasising the social justice aspects of Catholic doctrine, (p18-20) the ground may be shift-

ing for revolutionary socialists and others who want to see an egalitarian world.

Inequality is inseparable from struggles against oppression, and for liberation, generally; feminist struggles, queer struggles, the struggle for self-determination. Nelson Mandela, a leader and symbol of the struggle against apartheid, died late last year. Fightback covers his complex and contradictory legacy from p13-17.

In Aotearoa/NZ, 2014 is an election year. Fightback has no illusions that we can simply vote socialism in, or that going into coalition with capitalist governments will provide a short-cut for socialists. However, by bringing wider community struggles to parliament, we aim to play an oppositional role that can point the way to a democratic socialist world.

Fightback will be supporting the MANA Movement in the general elections. MANA has a proven leadership, both in community struggles and in democratically bringing the voice of the movement to parliament. We aim to take every opportunity in 2014 to advance the struggle for a new, just society.

About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. Fightback stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring "rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed." Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Fightback
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Monthly magazine published by: **Fightback**

Fightback November 2013,
Vol.1, No 9, Issue No 9

Coordinating Editors

Daphne Lawless, Ian Anderson

Proofing/Content

Bronwen Beechey

Layout:

Joel Cosgrove

Assisting Editors

Wei Sun, Kelly Pope, Grant Brookes, Byron Clark, Jared Phillips, Thomas Roud

Fightback

Fightback 2014 summer conference (report)

by Fightback reporters

On the 3rd to the 5th of January in Christchurch, Fightback held our 2014 summer conference. Over the weekend members participated in education sessions and decision-making that will inform our activism over the coming year.

In the 2014 General Elections, Fightback will be supporting the MANA Movement as a progressive, democratic alternative which links indigenous sovereignty and the struggle for an egalitarian society.

Fightback resolved to oppose any entry by MANA into a coalition with Labour. Instead we support the formation of a new organisation which brings together MANA and other community and workers' movements. A central topic of discussion at the 2014 Summer Conference was the role that the Labour Party currently plays in representing the interests of capitalism or the working class. This is an issue we intend to continue to engage in discussion around during the coming year.

Fightback participates in the global struggle against imperialism: the domination by the wealthy elite of the global majority, by military or other means. At the conference, Fightback endorsed the global call for boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) on Israel, in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

Fightback also discussed our perspectives around where the labour movement is at today, and how we can constructively support workers' struggles. The struggles at the ports and in the meatworks around the country last year have been defensive struggles (protecting gains previously won by organised workers) against casualisation (temporary or contract work without guaranteed minimum hours, sick leave

or holiday pay) which the bosses have sought to impose. Meanwhile, service-sector unions such as Unite and FIRST Union have waged proactive campaigns against existing casualisation in the workplace, aiming to gain better conditions for workers beyond protecting the little that already exist. We believe that Secure Work, Secure Hours, and a Living Wage are the most pressing issues facing workers across different sectors, and that the labour movement should aim for unity around these demands.

At the conference, Fightback endorsed the concept of eco-socialism, as defined in the 2008 Belem declaration:

[eco-socialism] aims to stop and to reverse the disastrous process of global warming... and to construct a radical and practical alternative to the capitalist system. Eco-socialism is grounded in a transformed economy founded on the non-monetary values of social justice and ecological balance. It criticizes both capitalist 'market ecology' and productivist socialism which ignored the earth's equilibrium and limits. It redefines the path and goal of socialism within an ecological and democratic framework.

Fightback is also working to challenge rape culture and establish safer spaces on the left as part of a broader struggle for gender and women's liberation. To that end we are developing safer spaces guidelines within Fightback, including electing safer spaces contacts in each branch who will have an understanding of trauma, and who members can talk to if they have concerns.

The conference also resolved to establish a website for publishing discussion documents which are used to democratically develop perspectives within Fightback. We are making these public so that people can see the discussions

that have taken place behind our activity.

Fightback will continue to maintain our website and monthly magazine, to provide a radical view on New Zealand and international news, and present our ideas to workers organisations such as unions and community and activist groups. In addition, Fightback resolved to publish new pamphlets reflecting our revised perspectives, beginning with Mike Kyriazopoulos' *The Treaty, the Foreshore and Seabed and Tino Rangati-ratanga*.

Finally, Fightback noted the absence and congratulated the work of comrade Mike Kyriazopoulos. Mike recently passed away, taken by Motor Neurone Disease. Mike spent much of his life organising working-class resistance, and made major contributions to the development of Fightback. We send condolences to his friends and family.

Eating disorders—capitalism and patriarchy's fault!

by Wei Sun (*Fightback, Christchurch*)

Eating disorders are mental illnesses that occur across all genders, cultural backgrounds, and ages. According to the Eating Disorders Association of NZ, eating disorders have the highest death rate of all mental illnesses. Statistically, 1.7% of all New Zealanders - approximately 68,000 people - will have an eating disorder at some point in their lifetime. A mental health survey conducted by the Ministry of Health in 2006 showed that anorexia has a much higher death rate than other eating disorders such as bulimia. One in 100 with anorexia who have sought treatment die each year, and up to 20% die over a 20 year period either as a result of complications from the illness or from suicide. Only 60% fully recover in the end.

Clearly, the extremely high death rate and low recovery rate of eating disorders is very alarming. Studies among the fully recovered population say that serious long term effects can be caused by anorexia even though these people are said to be “fully recovered”. Apart from physical damage, there are also many negative effects on their mental health such as mood swings, anxiety and depression.

So where does this mental illness come from? And why are people becoming more and more obsessed with thinness? Since the 1960s, the cult of thinness started growing in America. Especially among young women, thinness was not just a physical ideal but also a moral judgment—thinness represented a form of virtue, for example, self-control, moderation and restraint. The culture viewed obesity as a mark of ugliness and greed. Reflecting the dominance of American culture, this idea spread around the globe.

The fashion, pharmaceutical and food industries made multimillion-dollar profits from advertising and selling their weight loss products. Even the bookstores started having big sections of weight loss methods, weight loss recipes and so on. In the late 20th century, these diet books had millions in print; today, there are countless more.

As thinness started representing health as well as beauty, magazine publishers created the “slim and flawless” cover girls to further promote this new “physical perfection”. Large scale markets were exploiting women's insecurities about their looks for the sake of profit.

Females represent approximately 90 percent and males 10 percent of all eating disorders. Why are women especially vulnerable to eating disorders? We are influenced by patriarchal institutions. Patriarchy refers to a system of society in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

One major manifestation of patriarchy is the primary image of women as objects of decorative worth - good housewives and mothers who ‘belong

in the kitchen’. From the conventional family, schools and the media, girls learn from a very young age that the rewards of our society go to those who conform, not simply on the level of overt behaviour, but on the level of biology—if you want to be valued, get thin.

Capitalism motivated producers to create new needs and exploit new markets. The beauty industry not only viewed women's bodies as controllable and profitable objects but also promoted insecurity by encouraging women to buy beauty products, which represented a woman's femininity and ability to hold on to her man. Those new markets clearly demonstrate women's emerging roles as both consumer and commodity during the rise of capitalism.

At the same time, food industries, especially the American junk food industries, put their prices as low as possible to get people to buy junk food. Obesity specialist Dr Thomas Wadden complains that for every dollar spent on anti-obesity research, the junk food industries spend one hundred dollars to get people to keep buying their food.



Feminism

"We're being fattened up by the food industry and slimmed down by the twelve-billion-dollar diet and exercise industry. That's great for the capitalist system, but it's not so great for the consumer," Wadden says.

As people started realising the problems of the cult of thinness, variety of self-help and recovery markets flooded the marketplace. However, this meant that the reality of oppression was replaced with the metaphor of addiction. The market thus both created a problem and then posited itself as the solution to that problem.

I am a sufferer of anorexia and bulimia. I started being concerned about my weight when I was 11 years old in China, when half of my female classmates started passing around fashion magazines and talking about losing weight.

At that time, I was 149cm, weighing 36kg, which was on the low end of 'normal weight'. However, I decided that I was fat and started working on losing weight, because some other girls around me called themselves "fat" and

were constantly dieting, even though they were about my size or even slightly smaller.

The media coverage of eating disorders portrayed the image of the sickly anorexic as glamorous and feminine. For many years, I had been hearing things like "if you get fat, you will never get a boyfriend or a job" from my female classmates, friends, and workmates. As I became older, I started wondering why eating disorders only appear among females in general, and began questioning the relations between eating disorders and gender.

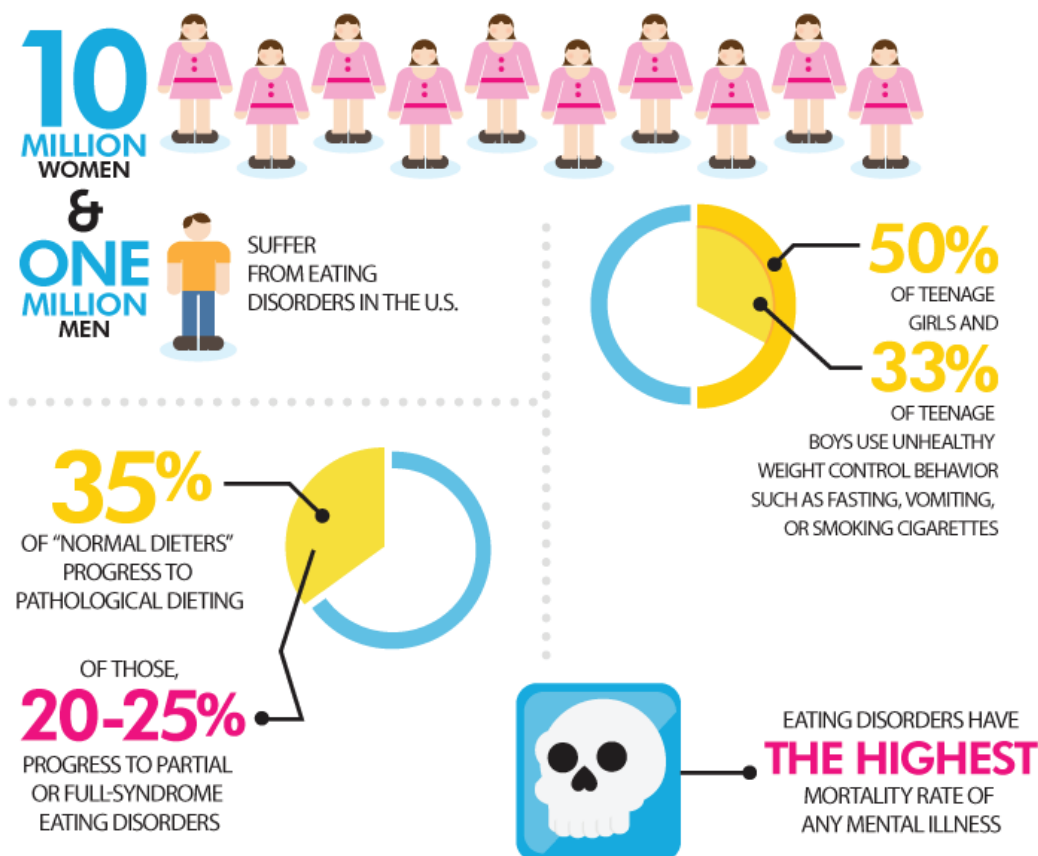
I am 21 years old now and still struggle with eating disorders. I have been to the point where I had to be admitted to the hospital due to anorexia and bulimia. But now I have realized that there are relationships between women's rigid control of their bodies and their lack of power in other areas of life. The concept of feminine identity within patriarchy is fundamentally problematic. I also do not wish to continue being a passive consumer under capitalism.

Commonly offered solutions to eating

disorders are personal ones—"get treatment!", rather than a wider systemic approach—"smash patriarchy!" The feminist Carol Hanisch wrote in her 1968 essay *The Personal Is Political*:

"There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution." Individualist solutions fail to examine wider issues such as lack of education and a patriarchal system that produces and reproduces gender inequality.

It may yet be possible to dismantle the cult of thinness through social activism. To achieve the purpose of raising public awareness, one very important method in social activism is public education. A critical examination of various features of capitalism and patriarchy, combined with material changes to the structures that enable them, could help to diminish the strictures that define women primarily in terms of our bodies. The rate of eating disorders worldwide would fall when a woman's body no longer serves as a cage.





A young migrant woman's experience of work in NZ

Migrant workers in struggle; Auckland taxi drivers on hunger strike in protest at excessive Auckland Airport fees.

By Wei Sun.

After the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in 1840 anyone could immigrate to New Zealand. While most settlers in the nineteenth century came from the UK, substantial numbers of Chinese labours immigrated to work on the goldfields of Otago. These migrants faced discrimination from white migrants but were not discriminated against in law until 1881 when a 'poll tax' was introduced for Chinese entering New Zealand.

The 1920 Immigration Restriction Act allowed the Minister of Customs to exclude any people who were "unsuit-

able". While not officially adopting the "White New Zealand" immigration policy, the law was used in practice to restrict the immigration of Asian people, especially Chinese. The idea of a "White New Zealand" was supported by the early Labour as well as the Liberal and Reform parties (forerunners of National, which formed when they merged).

Asian students began coming to New Zealand to study under the Colombo Plan in the 1950s, some choosing to stay after completing study. However the 1920 law was used to restrict Asian immigration throughout most of the twentieth century. From 1974, criteria for entry to New Zealand gradually

changed from race or nationality to merits and skills, but it wasn't until the 1987 Immigration Act that legal discrimination against some races and nationalities was ended.

Today migrant workers are still struggling for their equal rights. Fast food companies such as Burger King and McDonalds employ large numbers of migrant workers and international students on low wages. Even some of those who have worked for Burger King for over ten years are still struggling on minimum wage. One of the biggest issues in the fast food industry is the exploitation and bullying of migrant workers.

Open borders

Many employers threaten their migrant workers by saying they might withdraw the workers' work visa. Thus many migrants end up working under unreasonable working conditions and extremely low wages. While some unions still maintain a hostile attitude towards immigrants, Unite has made an impact organising in migrants and international students in the fast food industry.

As an international student myself, I am currently holding a student visa which allows me to work up to 20 hours a week except for summer and winter holidays. In 2011, which was my first year in New Zealand, I had three jobs at different Chinese restaurants in Christchurch. Due to my lack of knowledge of New Zealand's employment law and a strong English language barrier, I believed that it was "normal" and "reasonable" to work for nine dollars an hour in the first three-month trial period. At all of these restaurants I was getting paid cash.

I was being told off all the time. My bosses pointed at my nose and yelled at me almost every time I was on my shift, mostly because I was not moving fast enough or smiling enough to the customers. I had to cover all the "losses" made by myself due to careless working. The worst times were when the till was fifty dollars short, or when customers ran away without paying the bills.

At the first place I worked, Zest Noodle House, my bosses would tell me to leave when there were not enough customers so they could just work by themselves. Sometimes after a long commute to work they told me to leave after one and half or two hours because it was not 'busy enough'.

I signed the date, my name, starting time and finishing time of the day on a notebook they had for all the staff, and they paid every one of us cash on our last shift of the week. Unsurprisingly, the cash was always short, sometimes 50 cents, sometimes a few dollars.

I ended up quitting the job, like all the

other previous staff had. I never got time and a half pay on public holidays, or sick pay. As I heard from previous co-workers and Chinese friends, this sort of thing is a common experience, and a common response; leaving instead of reporting the employers or taking other action. It is a sad but 'normal' thing that we are all shy, scared, or confused and never tell anyone else or get help.

Now it has been over two years since I was employed by those Chinese restaurants' owners, and I do regret not standing up for myself and the co-workers. Of course horrible things as such do not just happen to Chinese students. One of my Thai friends told me the situation was exactly the same at the restaurant she was working at. She was threatened that her visa would be withdrawn if she refused to get paid ten dollars per hour cash.

A Japanese friend of mine also told me that his previous boss promised to get him a work visa for his permanent residency if he agreed to work under certain wage and conditions. He worked for a year, but the work visa or residency never happened.

More recently I was employed at a dairy in south west Christchurch. I was extremely happy when they decided to hire me, because they agreed to pay me proper minimum wage and tax to the government rather than cash "under the table", but I left after one year due to sexual harassment over the last two months.

On one occasion when I was doing the end of the day settlement and closing the shop, my boss threw a \$50-dollar note at my face. He said that the camera was off and no one would ever know, plus I needed cash anyway. I said there is no way I am going to do that, and then quit the job not long after.

I had a long talk with him. I said "Look, you've got a lovely wife and a 23-year-old daughter. If you stop doing this, I will not report you, because your wife (the other boss) is the nicest boss I have

ever had. But you have to promise to stop doing this, otherwise I really will report you." He agreed.

A little over six months since I quit the job at the dairy, a young woman who works at a neighbouring shop owned by the same people contacted me and told me that the boss attempted to harass another Chinese girl who worked at the dairy, who then quit.

This time I will not let him go. We have agreed that the girl from the dairy, the girl from the neighbouring shop, and I are going to report this boss together.

At the beginning of last year, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies pointed out that Kiwi xenophobia has been growing. I have experienced xenophobia myself. Some employers only seek employees of their ethnicity, with similar values and beliefs, and avoid 'the others'.

Maintaining a work visa is of utmost importance to many migrant workers. To some of us, the most difficult condition we face is that we could be arrested and deported for militant action. But since though we have the most to lose from militant action, sometimes we do know a lot about unionism and politics.

Migrant workers are part of the working class who contribute to New Zealand society. We bring our experiences from our home countries, and help the New Zealand working class to be more cosmopolitan and international. It is important to defend all workers against attacks, including the controls put on migrant workers that help maintain their oppression and exploitation. Capitalism exploits the global working class as a whole, therefore, the more we unite workers, not divide them along lines of race or nationality, the stronger we get, and the better we can fight against the system itself.

Why you should get involved in Fightback

We hold capitalism responsible for the environmental crisis

The capitalist drive for unlimited profit threatens to destroy the whole basis of life on Earth. In contrast to the capitalist parties (including the Green Party) who demand that workers reduce their living standards for the sake of the planet, we say that it is the capitalist system that must be

challenged, since most environmental damage is a result of production, not consumption. We look to examples of working-class actions like the “green bans” initiated by New South Wales building labourers in the 1970s for inspiration on how workers can change the priorities of society.

We are building a revolutionary party

We believe that the working class and oppressed can only achieve liberation as a conscious project, based on ideas which are debated, tested against reality, and constantly reviewed and improved. The working class can only learn from history – including previous workers’ struggles, victorious or defeated – through a conscious political movement which preserves these lessons. To create a mass socialist movement, workers who have already drawn revolutionary conclusions must organise together in a political organisation. This kind of party is still some

way off in New Zealand. But we believe that Fightback activists and our political ideas will be central to that movement of the future. Help us build it now! Our members and supporters in the trade unions, the student movement, and many other struggles organise together, on the basis of common ideas, as part of a concerted fight for a classless society without oppression or exploitation. If you agree with our basic ideas, join us. If you don’t, work with us, debate with us, and continue the discussion!

Contact

Auckland

Daphne

0272209552

daphne@randomstatic.net

Christchurch

Thomas

0279534800

thomas.roud@gmail.com

Wellington

Joel

022 384-1917

joel.cosgrove@gmail.com

Hamilton

Jared

029 494-9863

jared@unite.org.nz



300 hotel workers strike in Fiji

On December 31 close to three hundred workers at Sheraton Fiji, Sheraton Villas, and Westin Denarau Island Resort took industrial action. Workers held a spontaneous protest against the unilateral removal of their staff benefits. The strike was initiated by the landowning committee (LOC) after maternity leave and overtime pay entitlements were taken away.

"In fourteen days we will go back to work... sort things out. All those temporary staff who were supposed to be permanent, they have to be made permanent and those who are owed maternity leave and sick leave etcetera - they have to be paid," LOC spokesperson Simone Masicola told the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.

"It might not seem like much but we were given a few hampers during Christmas celebrations, this was always given out to staff in past years. Some of us depended on these benefits because most of us come from poor backgrounds, so when they reduced this benefit, we were very upset over it." Sikeli Gavidi, head of the LOC told the Fiji Times. Following the strike an agreement was reached between the workers and the Sheraton within hours. However the

government claimed the strike was illegal due to notice not being given by the union. Six unionists were arrested, including Gavidi and general secretary of the National Union of Hospitality Catering and Tourism Industries Daniel Urai, who was escorted from his office by fifteen police officers.

All six pleaded not guilty when they appeared in court, on the grounds that the strike was initiated by the LOC and not the union. The matter has been adjourned until March 17 for further disclosures to be submitted to the defence, but in the meantime the six have had travel bans imposed as well as being required to report to the police station every Friday. Police are questioning others involved in the strike.

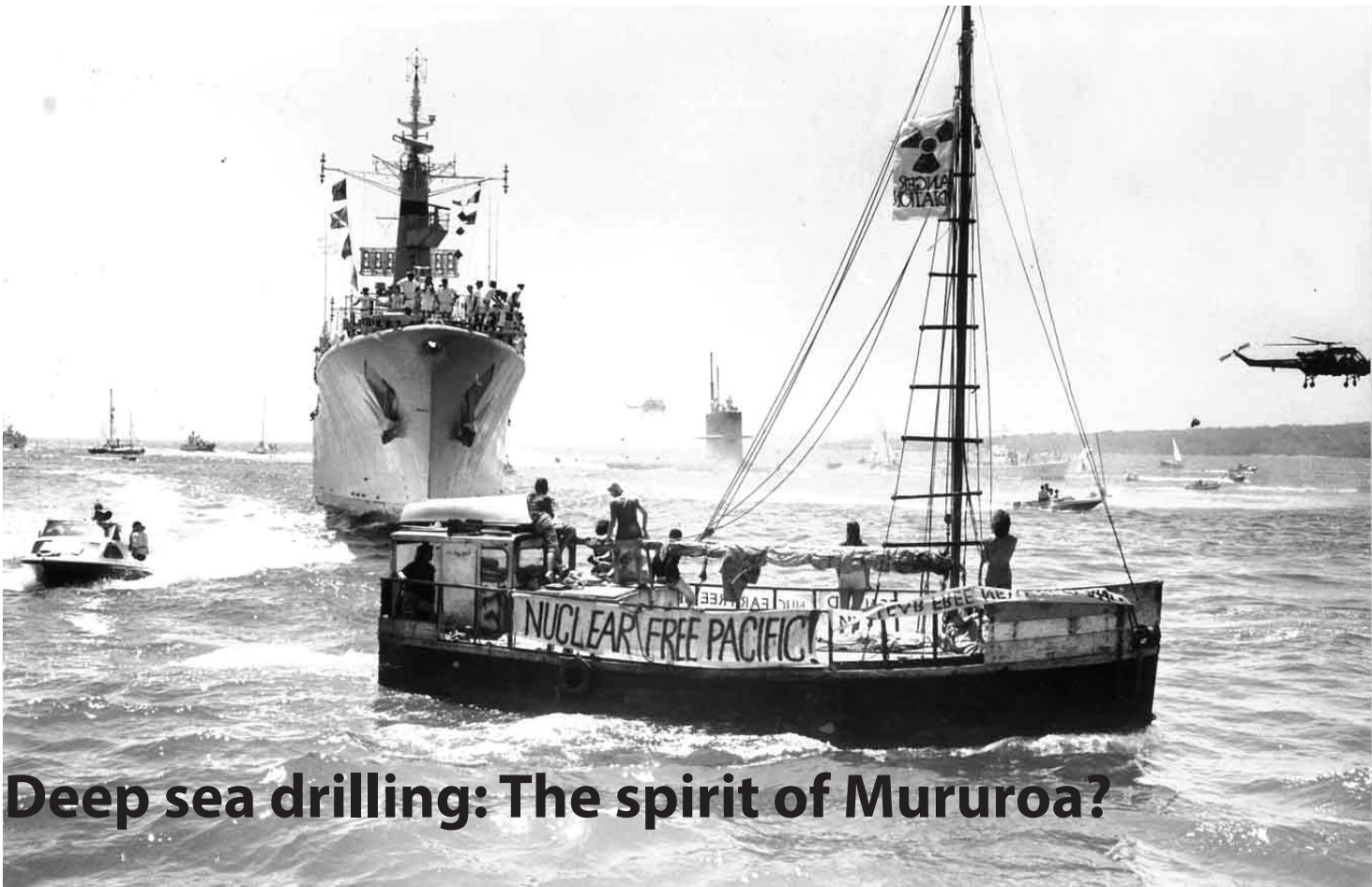
"This is on-going persecution of trade unionists in Fiji," Felix

Anthony, Fiji Trade Union Congress general secretary, told Radio Australia. "This interim regime has an agenda against trade unions in this country and this has been evidence over the past few years, with all the decrees that come in, the essential industries decree - basically the agenda here is to kill the trade unions".

"There was absolutely no need for the police to take into custody the workers and Mr Urai and keep them overnight, there's absolutely no justification for that...what we see here is basically an abuse of powers."



Fijian workers taking part in the strike.



Deep sea drilling: The spirit of Mururoa?

by Bronwen Beechey, *Fightback* (Auckland).

In June 1973, the NZ Labour government sent two Navy frigates to the Pacific atoll of Mururoa to formally protest against France's testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. The yachts *Spirit of Peace*, *Fri* and *Vega*, also sailed to Mururoa to observe the tests. Photographs of French sailors boarding the *Vega* and assaulting its skipper were published around the world. In November of that year, France announced that it would conduct all further nuclear testing underground.

Forty years after that partial victory, the *Vega* sailed to an area 185km from Raglan to protest at deep sea oil drilling in NZ waters. The US oil giant Anadarko had been granted a permit for exploratory drilling in waters up to 1600 metres deep, with an untested drilling ship. The *Vega* was part of the Oil Free Seas flotilla, which was also protesting the "Anadarko amendment" rushed through

parliament last May, which prohibits protesting at sea within 500 metres of an oil rig or drill ship illegal. While five of the six vessels of the Oil Free Seas flotilla stayed outside the 500-metre limit, the *Vega* remained on the drilling site for seven days. No action to move the *Vega* was taken.

In support of the flotilla, thousands gathered at West Coast beaches with banners expressing opposition to deep sea drilling. In a November poll run by the NZ Herald, a paper with a generally conservative readership, 2803 opposed deep sea drilling compared to 1305 in favour. In a TVNZ online poll conducted in response to the Oil Free Seas protest, 80% supported the flotilla's actions. But in contrast with the protests at Mururoa, the Oil Free Seas flotilla did not have the support of the Labour Party. Leader David Cunliffe declared that Labour was "not opposed in principle" to offshore oil drilling.

The protest flotilla left the drilling area on November 26, at the same time as

Greenpeace filed papers at the High Court requesting a judicial review of Anadarko's permit to drill. Greenpeace argued that the company had not released its Emergency Response Plan, or spill modelling showing the possible impact of an oil spill, to NZ's Environmental Protection Authority. Anadarko only provided a summary version of its discharge management plan and contingency plans to the EPA.

The High Court challenge was dismissed on the basis that under the recent Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf Act (EEZ), the EPA is responsible for assessing the environmental impacts of drilling before issuing a marine consent. But the environmental assessment excludes consideration of detailed plans for responding to an oil spill - that responsibility rests with Maritime NZ. Justice Alan Mackenzie found the EPA had applied the new law correctly, as its role was "limited to assessing whether the application contains information about the required matters",

Eco-socialism

and its decision was “essentially administrative”.

Shortly before Christmas, 1800 pages of documents supporting Anadarko’s drilling applications were released under the Official Information Act. Among them was Anadarko’s contingency plan in the event of an uncontrollable spill. In a “worst case scenario” where a blowout could not be contained and the drillship would have to be evacuated, it would take at least 35 days to cap the well as equipment for a capping stack would have to be sourced from Peterhead, Scotland (a service centre for the North Sea oil fields), flown to Singapore for assembly, and then shipped to New Zealand. In the meantime oil would be spilling into the Tasman Sea at the rate of 12,000 barrels a day. The contingency plan was approved by Maritime NZ.

In a spill model released by Greenpeace last year, the estimate was 10,000 barrels a day. That model was described by Prime Minister John Key as “scaremongering” and by Petroleum Exploration and Production Association CEO David Robinson as “science fiction”.

The oil spill from the cargo ship *Rena*, which ran aground in the Bay of Plenty in 2011, was the equivalent of 2500 barrels. An inquiry following that disaster, which caused widespread death of wildlife and seriously affected the fishing and tourist industries in the area, found that Maritime NZ’s response was inadequate, largely due to lack of funding, lack of skills and experience and lack of suitable equipment.

Government and industry spokespeople

have been quick to claim that a spill of the magnitude projected in the documents would be extremely unlikely. But we have seen the results of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in which vast quantities of oil poured into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days before the spill was capped. (Anadarko, as a quarter share investor in the well, was found jointly liable and recently agreed to pay BP \$5.5 billion as part of the legal settlement). The Deepwater Horizon was drilling in 1500 metres of water, shallower than the proposed drilling site off NZ. The catastrophic effects of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill are still taking their toll on wildlife and residents in the area.

But this can be prevented. Opposition to offshore drilling off the East Cape, led by Greenpeace and local iwi, chased Brazilian oil company Petrobras from NZ waters in 2012. And the campaign against deep sea oil drilling is set to continue. The National government has granted five more exploration permits to Anadarko and other big oil companies, including Shell, to drill for oil and natural gas off Northland, Taranaki, Canterbury and Otago. And under draft regulations to accompany the EEZ Act, deep-sea drilling will become a “non-notified activity” – meaning oil companies will be able to undertake deep-sea drilling without notifying the public that they intend to do so or giving the public a chance to scrutinise their plans. If this is adopted, it will have obvious implications for other dangerous activities like fracking, and for proposed projects including plans by Canadian

company TAG to drill near Taranaki/Mt Egmont, a site of great significance to Maori.

Already opposition is gearing up. On January 10, opponents to the TAG project held a noisy protest outside the company’s New Plymouth offices. Three hundred people marched in Wellington on January 24, presenting a “trespass notice” at Anadarko’s office. A hikoī from Cape Te Reinga to Waitangi opposing drilling by Norway’s Statoil in Te Reinga Basin is planned to begin February 1. An Oil Free Summit held in Dunedin on the weekend of 11-12 January established a “rapid response team” of 260 vessels prepared to take to the waters around Otago to hinder Anadarko’s operations.

In the 1970s and 1980s, peace squadrons like this took to the waters to protest against visiting US nuclear warships. They inspired actions on-shore – including political campaigns for local councils to declare their communities nuclear-free, and industrial action by workers. When the *USS Truxton* sailed into Wellington harbour, seafarers on the Interislander ferries went on strike and wharfies walked off the job to join huge anti-nuclear protests. Even the cleaners at the US Embassy went on strike.

A similar mass movement to oppose investment in fossil fuels, call for investments in alternative fuel sources, and defend our democratic rights to protest and to be informed of proposed development, will be needed to counter the government’s drive for profit at the expense of safety and the environment.



A recent anti-oil drilling protest in Wellington.

"The People Shall Govern!" Nelson Mandela and capitalist distortion



by Ian Anderson, *Fightback* (Wellington).

Nelson Mandela died at age 95, on December 5 2013. As a leading figure in the African National Congress (ANC) which led the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa, Mandela has inspired many for different reasons.

Mandela was released from prison in 1990, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, and elected to presidency in 1994. The history behind these events make them even more notable – Mandela's decades of imprisonment beforehand, the slogan "Free Mandela" coming to represent the global and historic struggle against apartheid. Mainstream capitalist coverage papers over the complexities of this history, and its lessons for ongoing and future struggle.

Although this article does not intend to tell this story completely, we must unearth layers deliberately hidden or ignored by the powerful.

Dominant narrative: "Truth" and Reconciliation

Since Mandela's death, the dominant capitalist narrative has focused on "Truth and Reconciliation," in the words of the commission set up by Mandela and the ANC in 1995. Reconciliation is particularly celebrated; the peaceful resolution of conflict, the healing of wounds, peace between races. However, as peace is nothing without justice, reconciliation is nothing without truth; this capitalist narrative contains untruths, oversights, and untold stories.

Widely circulated images and quotes from Mandela are largely drawn from the 1990s, not the half-century of struggle before that. Out of context, the quotes are inspiring in a vague way. For example, a USA Today piece listing "15 of Nelson Mandela's best quotes" focused on the positive:

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies" [...] "Everyone can rise

above their circumstances and achieve success if they are dedicated to and passionate about what they do."

Capitalist media now portrays Mandela as a forgiving and peaceful figure. Articles even bear the headline "Nelson Mandela, South African icon of peaceful resistance, dies." However, the decision by Mandela and the ANC to lay down arms was a tactical decision, in a situation where ending formal apartheid was now a political possibility – due in large part to a mass campaign of strikes and other militant action.

Mandela and the ANC never rejected armed struggle in principle. In fact, Mandela later stated his disagreement with the IRA decommissioning its arms, stating in an interview: "My position is that you don't hand over your weapons until you get what you want."

Online, radicals have responded to dominant depictions of Mandela by circulating his revolutionary statements



The 1981 tour polarized the country.

against capitalism, against US imperialism, and for armed struggle. Lenin's words from *The State and Revolution* summarise this response:

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it."

Reclaiming this revolutionary history is

necessary, and illuminates the hypocrisy of imperialist leaders who gathered at Mandela's funeral on December 15. However, Mandela was romanticised before his death, from the 1990s onwards. Both the revolutionary Mandela and the cookie-cutter Mandela are half-truths.

Global struggle: Local impact

By definition, apartheid is divisive. Worldwide, the struggle against apartheid polarised political opinion, asking the old question "whose side are you on?"

Locally, leaders of the MANA movement, including John Minto and Hone Harawira, were active in the campaign of solidarity with South Africa. Famously, the Halt All Racist Tours boycott of the Springbok tour in 1981 (documented in Merata Mita's *PATU*, available for free at NZ On Screen)

sharply polarised public opinion. Tanga-ta whenua in the movement also called attention to the links with colonisation in Aotearoa.

Now in the wake of this struggle, imperialist ruling class hypocrisy is galling. Even Barack Obama, who claims inspiration from Mandela, supports apartheid in Palestine.

British Prime Minister David Cameron, who paid tribute to Mandela after his passing, was aligned in the 1980s with the conservatives who circulated "Hang Mandela" posters – although Cameron himself was largely indifferent to politics at this point. Similarly, Aotearoa/NZ prime minister John Key has refused to state a clear position on the boycott campaign. When prompted on his views in a television interview, Key responded: "Oh, I can't even remember ... 1981, I was 20 ... ah ... I don't really know. I didn't really have a strong feeling on it at the time. Look, it's such a

long time ago.”

Susan Devoy, Race Relations Commissioner and former world squash champion, did not support the boycott. In her autobiography, she explains: “I don’t think boycotting sporting contacts helped the situation over there. If it was going to help, I could have seen the justification in it.”

Recently when Te Papa held an exhibition about the 1981 Springbok tour, 56% of attendants said they thought the tour should have gone ahead. Apartheid, and tactics in opposing it, continue to divide political opinion. However economic, political and cultural boycotts – combined with struggle on the ground in South Africa – helped to isolate the

apartheid regime.

John Minto reported in the *Daily Blog* how the sporting boycott inspired Mandela and others in South Africa: “In 1981 Mandela had been imprisoned on Robben Island for 17 years and he said that when the prisoners heard the rugby match between the Springboks and Waikato had been cancelled due to

1955 — 1985

FREEDOM CHARTER

The People shall Govern!
All National Groups shall have Equal Rights!
The People shall share in the Country’s Wealth!
The Land shall be shared among those who work it!
All shall be Equal before the Law!
All shall enjoy Equal Human Rights!
There shall be Work and Security!
The Doors of Learning and of Culture shall be opened!
There shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!
There shall be Peace and Friendship!

30TH ANNIVERSARY

SCRAP APARTHEID! DEMAND THE CHARTER!

International

anti-apartheid protestors invading the field, the prisoners grabbed the bars of their cells doors and rattled them right around the prison – he said it was like the sun came out.”

1955 Freedom Charter: Popular democracy

In the 1950s, the ANC with other groups developed the “Freedom Charter,” stating core principles in the struggle against apartheid. They sent out fifty thousand volunteers to develop ‘freedom demands’ in consultation with the people. The Freedom Charter was adopted by 3000 delegates at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, on June 26 1955.

The Freedom Charter’s key slogan was “The People Shall Govern,” a far cry both from the capitalist system in South Africa in 1955, and today. Along with full rights for all citizens regardless of race, the charter demanded common ownership of land and industry. The charter also demanded the right to housing, jobs, fully-funded education for children and greater access to higher education.

The ANC was persecuted by South Africa’s anti-communist laws. In 1964, speaking to the court before his imprisonment, Mandela explained that while he was not a capital-C Communist, the cause of ending apartheid and the cause of communism are aligned:

“It is perhaps difficult for white South Africans, with an ingrained prejudice against communism, to understand why experienced African politicians so readily accept communists as their friends. But to us the reason is obvious. Theoretical differences amongst those fighting against oppression is a luxury we cannot afford at this stage. What is more, for many decades communists were the only political group in South Africa who were prepared to treat Africans as human beings and their

equals; who were prepared to eat with us; talk with us, live with us, and work with us. They were the only political group which was prepared to work with the Africans for the attainment of political rights and a stake in society. Because of this, there are many Africans who, today, tend to equate freedom with communism. They are supported in this belief by a legislature which brands all exponents of democratic government and African freedom as communists and bans many of them (who are not communists) under the Suppression of Communism Act. Although I have never been a member of the Communist Party, I myself have been named under that pernicious Act because of the role I played in the Defiance Campaign. I have also been banned and imprisoned under that Act...

“Today I am attracted by the idea of a classless society, an attraction which springs in part from Marxist reading and, in part, from my admiration of the structure and organization of early African societies in this country. The land, then the main means of production, belonged to the tribe. There were no rich or poor and there was no exploitation.”

The ANC was driven underground. However, when the mass struggle of the 1970s and 1980s revived the challenge against apartheid, the Freedom Charter and the demand to free Nelson Mandela found new global currency.

The Freedom Charter’s popular democracy (in both process and demands) contrasts sharply with capitalist democracy. In particular, the 1994 election which finally brought the ANC to power shows the dictatorship underlying capitalist democracy.

1994 ANC election: Capitalist dictatorship

The ANC’s betrayals of the Freedom Charter, and the majority struggling for justice, make the most sense in a global context.

During the Cold War, while South African apartheid was backed by US imperialism, the ANC was backed by the Soviet Union. The Soviet bloc, however bureaucratic and corrupt, acted as a global rear guard against imperialism.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a global shift towards ‘neoliberalism,’ a new global capitalist regime defined by privatisation, the gutting of the welfare state, attacks on union rights, and flexible organisation of work. This global assault on working class organisation was first trialled in Chile in 1973, before Western governments followed suit. In Aotearoa/NZ it was called Rogernomics, after Roger Douglas of the Fourth Labour government.

Then followed the “End of History.” The ending of the Cold War, by the imposition of neoliberalism in the former Soviet bloc, was seen as a final victory over socialism. For the ANC, this meant the loss of a major ally.

In the 1990s, with mass struggles bringing victory against apartheid into sight, the ANC was internationally isolated. They could choose to go it alone, confronting the South African ruling class while facing international isolation and sanctions, or accept imperialist backing and carry out neoliberal attacks on the working class.

In a 1993 speech to trade unionists, Mandela acknowledged the possibility of this betrayal, and said the workers must be ready to overthrow an ANC government as they had overthrown apartheid:

“How many times has the liberation movement worked together with workers and then at the moment of victory betrayed the workers?

There are many examples of that in the world.

“It is only if the workers strengthen their organisation before and after liberation that you can win. If you relax your vigilance you will find that your sacrifices have been in vain.

“You just support the African National Congress only so far as it delivers the goods. If the ANC government does not deliver the goods, you must do to it what you have done to the apartheid regime.”

The following year, before the 1994 election, the ANC chose to accept a loan from the International Monetary Fund. The IMF loan carried the condition of adopting neoliberal policies, many against ANC policy. South Africa in the mid-to-late 90s joined the many countries in which the global ruling class took advantage of a crisis to carry out neoliberalism. Despite his words in 1993, Mandela went along with this shift.

In an article printed in the *Black Agenda Report*, former ANC Cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils described the decision to accept the IMF loan as a “Faustian” pact, the ANC selling its soul:

“What I call our Faustian moment came

when we took an IMF loan on the eve of our first democratic election. That loan, with strings attached that precluded a radical economic agenda, was considered a necessary evil, as were concessions to keep negotiations on track and take delivery of the promised land for our people. Doubt had come to reign supreme: we believed, wrongly, there was no other option; that we had to be cautious, since by 1991 our once powerful ally, the Soviet Union, bankrupted by the arms race, had collapsed. Inexcusably, we had lost faith in the ability of our own revolutionary masses to overcome all obstacles. Whatever the threats to isolate a radicalizing South Africa, the world could not have done without our vast reserves of minerals. To lose our nerve was not necessary or inevitable. The ANC leadership needed to remain determined, united and free of corruption – and, above all, to hold on to its revolutionary will. Instead, we chickened out.”

The ANC carried out an important part of the Freedom Charter in ending formal apartheid, but abandoned its demands for economic justice. In contrast to the Freedom Charter slogan “The People Shall Govern,” South Africa remains governed by a capitalist elite.

For conservative forces, Mandela changed from a “terrorist” to a beacon of hope. Imperialist rulers accepted, even celebrated Mandela not just after the

defeat of formal apartheid, but following the ANC’s Faustian pact with neoliberal capitalism. For those who care about ending oppression, Mandela is a contradictory symbol, representing both a victory and a loss.

Ongoing struggles

In August 2012, South African security forces massacred striking mineworkers at Marikana. Workers are developing new organisations that can challenge the capitalist state. These new forces will be demonised, attacked and dismissed by the global ruling class, as Mandela was before.

South Africa’s struggle shows again that it’s not enough to struggle locally, only to be isolated when your struggle confronts the state; we need a global movement that can support struggles for justice and self-determination. National liberation struggles remain, including the fight against apartheid in Palestine.

In Aotearoa/NZ, Fightback supports the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” In developing new organisations and new global connections, we must keep in mind the intimate connection between indigenous liberation and the fight for an egalitarian society.



The Marikana massacre is symptomatic of the issues still facing South Africa.



Catholic Church: Is Francis a “Red Pope”?

by Daphne Lawless, *Fightback* (Auckland).

Less than one year into his tenure as head of the Roman Catholic Church and thus spiritual authority over 1.2 billion people, Pope Francis I (formerly Jorge Bergoglio) has been shaking up a lot of leftist and liberal assumptions about Catholicism being a bastion of unforgiving reactionary politics and child abuse.

Deacon Eric Stolz lists just a few of the way the new Pope has set an example of humility:

“Pope Francis has refused to wear the ermine-lined capes other popes wore. Rather than blessing the people in St. Peter’s Square on his election, he asked the people to bless him. He refuses to ride in a bulletproof Mercedes limousine. He rode on a bus with other cardinals right after his election.”

Perhaps most notably, Francis has explicitly criticised the free-market agenda of neoliberal capitalism. In his document *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), the Pope argues that:

“...some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.”

This quite timid reformist critique of capitalism has American conservative commentators screaming that the Pope has become a “Marxist”, while conservative Catholics argue that the Pope

must have been “misquoted” or “misinterpreted”.

Bureaucratic reform

Perhaps more concretely, Francis seems to have an agenda for reform of the Vatican bureaucracy. The Pope has revamped the powerful congregation for bishops, removing the likes of the conservative US cardinal Raymond Burke – an outspoken opponent of abortion and gay marriage. He has also dismissed all but one of the cardinals in charge of the Vatican Bank.

The infamous secrecy of the Vatican often gives rise to conspiracy theories. John Paul I, who was Pope for 33 days before his sudden death in 1978, is sometimes said to have been murdered by the Mafia for seeking to reform the Vatican Bank. Hence, one liberal commentator suggested Pope Francis should “employ a food taster” lest he meet a similar fate.

Catherine Pepinster, editor of the British Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, was quoted in *The Guardian*: “Many Catholics in recent years have experienced a certain amount of hostility from certain quarters for being Catholic and now that’s really changed and you don’t sense that so much.” She cites Internet comments on photos of the Pope embracing a man disfigured with tumours, which included such things as “The pope rocks”; or “I’m an atheist but this man could persuade me to believe in God.”

But sometimes the Pope’s new liberal fans don’t know what to make of the fact that he retains a reactionary opinion on women priests and homosexuality – for example, his excommunication of Greg Reynolds, an Australian priest who had pushed for a change in doctrine on these issues. He has also expressed strong sentiments against abortion.

Feudal monarchy

Some people have an incorrect idea of how the Catholic Church operates. It’s not an absolute monarchy, where what the Pope says goes on all issues. It’s more like a feudal monarchy, where a reformist pope must overcome resistance and even outright rebellion from the bishops and the Vatican bureaucracy. For example, liberal bishops in Britain and the US fought tooth and nail (albeit behind the scenes) against Pope Benedict’s approval for traditionalists to use the Latin Mass.

Also, it is simply impossible for any Pope to simply change Church doctrine. In Catholic tradition, “orthodoxy” is defined as “that which has historically been believed everywhere by everybody”. What this means is that – even when speaking “infallibly” on doctrine – no Pope can change the essential nature of Church teachings, only adapt it to new questions.

Even if, for some bizarre reason, a Pope were to be elected who was sympathetic to gay marriage, women priests and

reproductive rights, he would simply not be allowed to reverse Church teachings on those subjects. That is, not without a solid majority of supporters among the bishops and bureaucrats, and absolutely convincing written argument that this was not a departure from the Church’s eternal teachings.

Compared with Benedict

There is a simplistic view among leftists and liberals of Francis as a “Good Pope” worthy of support, as opposed to the contempt in which his predecessor, Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), is usually held. But the differences between the two men – who were both elected by the highest levels of Church leadership – are often exaggerated.

Benedict was decidedly favourable to the “Traditionalist” sector of Catholicism – those attached to Church tradition from before the Vatican II reforms of the 1960s, and who are generally associated with homophobic, sexist and anti-Semitic attitudes. However, it has also recently been revealed that, in his last two years as reigning Pope, Benedict defrocked (dismissed) more than 400 priests accused of sexual abuse of children. This complicates the stereotype that Catholic conservatives turn a blind eye to child rape by priests.

Detractors of Benedict often fixated upon his teenage service in the Hitler Youth – not that children in the last years of Nazi Germany had any say in the matter. But the more that Francis talks anti-capitalism and the need for a humbler, simpler lifestyle for clergy, the more that liberals are prepared to look the other way on his accommodation – as an adult priest – with the Argentinian military dictatorship of 1976-83.

Both men also shared an attitude to “liberation theology”. This was a radical movement within Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s, led by priests from Latin America who interpreted Christianity as meaning support for the struggles of workers and oppressed people.

Benedict, as Cardinal Ratzinger, was leader of the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith (the successor organisation to the Inquisition). As such, he led efforts in the 1980s to declare liberation theology a heresy, a form of “Christianised Marxism”. This project is said to have had the support of US foreign policy. But it also had the support of Francis (then Archbishop Bergoglio), as the then head of the Bishops’ Conference.

The difference is a difference of emphasis. Benedict, a former “attack dog” for Catholic orthodoxy, was mostly interested in safeguarding the integrity of Church doctrine and tradition, and lacked the communication skills required to make him likeable in the capitalist media. Francis, on the other hand, worked among the poor in Buenos Aires for decades, and is said to be quite indifferent to doctrinal details, while having a strong grasp of the primacy of the Church’s social mission. He has a much better grasp of what people want to hear.

Catholic social teaching

So certainly Francis is no Red. But some may be surprised to learn that, in criticising unbridled capitalism, Francis has not been acting against Catholic doctrine, but in full agreement with it.

The Catholic Church has been officially against the total dominance of capital over labour since 1891. In that year, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (Concerning New Things). Among other statements of Church social policy, this letter emphasised the right of all workers to a living wage and the right to bargain with employers on the basis of equality. It also promoted a welfare state, using phrases like:

“...the public administration must duly and solicitously provide for the welfare and the comfort of the working classes; otherwise, that law

Religion

of justice will be violated which ordains that each man shall have his due... wage-earners, since they mostly belong in the mass of the needy, should be specially cared for and protected by the government.

As an institution with origins in feudal times, and with an ideology based on charity, the Catholic Church has always had a horror of both class conflict, and the tendency of capitalism to overthrow traditional ways of life. The Pope's comments about "unbridled capitalism" have caused consternation among American conservatives and traditional Catholics – however, this is not a sign of Francis' "leftism", but of how far the neoliberal agenda of class warfare from above has become the common sense of the Right. Francis' comments would have been unremarkable from conservative politicians of the 1950s.

Religion and contradiction

It's vital to remember that all mass organisations – including the Catholic Church – are *contradictory* entities. Like all religion, the Church embraces progressive and reactionary features. It seeks to promote social justice and peace between opposing classes, at the same time as reinforcing "traditional" sexist and heteronormative family arrangements and an authoritarian social order. So those who declare that all religion is negative and evil are adopting an approach which will isolate them from those they hope to convince. The job of activists is to emphasise these contradictions, and to explain why true social justice cannot exist without – for example – a woman's right to control her own fertility.

Given that – according to some surveys – 95% of Catholics do not follow Church doctrine against the use of artificial contraception, it's clear that the

Pope is not the spiritual dictator which some atheist (or Protestant) writers have made him out to be. There are strong limits to how much his personal example or statements may change the minds of conservative members of his flock.

But what the Pope's comments on capitalism, and his steps to bring in a simpler lifestyle for Church leaders, offer to working people and socialists is an opening of the debate. He's not the first religious leader to do so – the Dalai Lama has accepted the label "Marxist" in the past. But Francis has greater influence in the United States and Western Europe, the heartland of global capitalism. He has opened up more space in the "official" media for concepts critical of neoliberal capitalism. He might not be a Red, but by following the dictates of his Catholic conscience, he may be helping those of us who are.



Inequality will be the issue for 2014

by Mike Treen, Unite General Secretary.
Abridged from full article on the Daily Blog.

In a speech to the Center for American Progress on December 4, 2013, Obama recognised the fact that “the American people’s frustrations with Washington are at an all-time high.” These frustrations are “rooted in the nagging sense that no matter how hard they work, the deck is stacked against them” and that there exists “a dangerous and growing inequality and lack of upward mobility that has jeopardized middle-class America’s basic bargain — that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead.”

Obama appeared to have no element of self-awareness when delivering the speech that the very economic policies he has implemented since coming to office may have contributed to the harsh

reality he describes.

Obama became US president in January 2009. A report in September 2013 revealed that 95 percent of America’s income gains over the four years since then have gone to the nation’s most affluent 1 percent. They also now accrue 20 percent of the nation’s total pre-tax income, doubling their 10 percent share from the 1970s. A few weeks after his speech, 1.3m jobless were cut from receiving benefits under a “compromise” two-year budget deal that was passed just before Congress left on its winter recess.

As liberal economist Dean Baker has noted, “Inequality did not just happen, it was deliberately engineered through a whole range of policies intended to redistribute income upwards.”

The Pope’s message was even more radical than Obama’s blustering. Pope Francis released his *Evangelii Gadium*, or Joy of the Gospel, attacking capital-

ism as a form of tyranny and calling on church and political leaders to address the needs of the poor. He attacked an “idolatry of money” that would lead to a “new tyranny”.

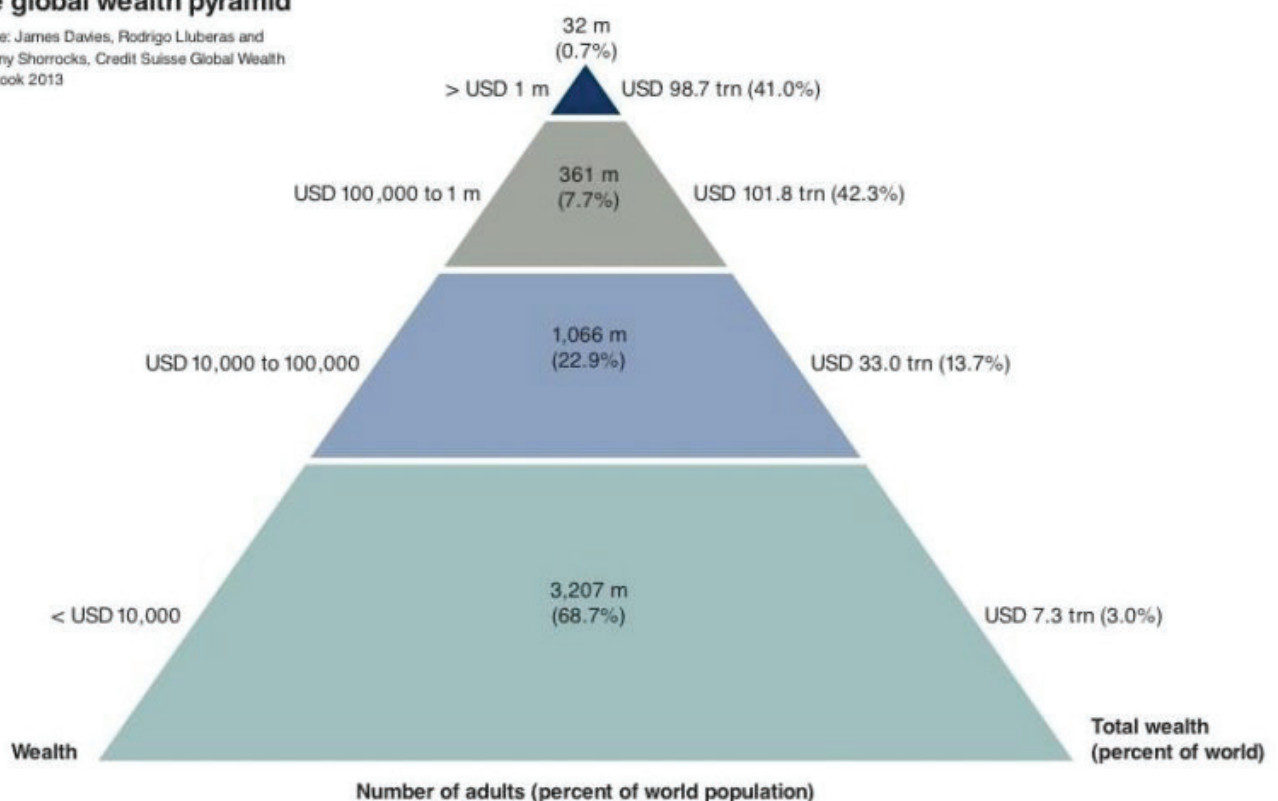
Even the Dalai Lama has joined in. In a speech one month ago in India, he said “We have to think seriously how to reduce this gap between the rich and the poor.”

He went so far as to describe himself as a Marxist. “As far as socio-economic theory is concerned I am a Marxist. I am attracted to the principle of equal distribution. The poor and helpless need more care. While capitalism is only about minting money,” he said.

The process of wealth concentration has been going on for the last three decades but has accelerated since the world financial crisis. That crisis was in part a product of the grotesque excesses of the super-rich and the speculative, indulgent frenzy as they searched for more

The global wealth pyramid

Source: James Davies, Rodrigo Lluberas and Anthony Shorrocks, Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook 2013



Inequality

and more ways to earn profits.

The largest Wall Street firms set aside \$91 billion for year-end bonuses in 2013. In effect, these gangster bankers in the US are the biggest welfare recipients of all time. Because the Federal Reserve has been maintaining interest rates at very low levels for such a long period, the US government is in effect subsidising bank profits to the tune of \$83 billion a year.

While wages have been squeezed and austerity budgets imposed all across the globe, the wealth of the world's billionaires has doubled since 2009 according to a report by UBS and Wealth-X that tracks super-rich individuals.

An annual report by financial advisors Capgemini and RBC Wealth Management records the wealth of high net worth individuals (HNWI) with \$1 million or more in investable assets and ultra-HNWI's with \$30 million or more in investable assets. The super-rich, representing just 0.13% of the world's population own 25% of all financial

assets (stocks, bonds and cash in banks). A website called "Luxury Society" notes that the global HNWI population of 12 million increased its investable wealth by 10% to \$46.2 trillion. But within that group, "Representing less than 1% of the global HNWI population, the world's 111,000 ultra-HNWIs control more than one-third (35.2%) of HNWI wealth." (The full report is available at <http://www.capgemini.com> for those with the stomach for it).

Credit Suisse also produce an annual wealth report and this year they had a great chart to go with it. The chart shows that there are 3.2 billion adults in the world with less than \$10,000 in net wealth. They collectively own total net wealth of \$7.3 trillion or 3% of total world wealth. At the top we have a group of 32 million or 0.7% of the total with 41% of the world's wealth – more than the bottom 91% of all adults.

As Warren Buffett, the second richest man in America, famously said, "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class,

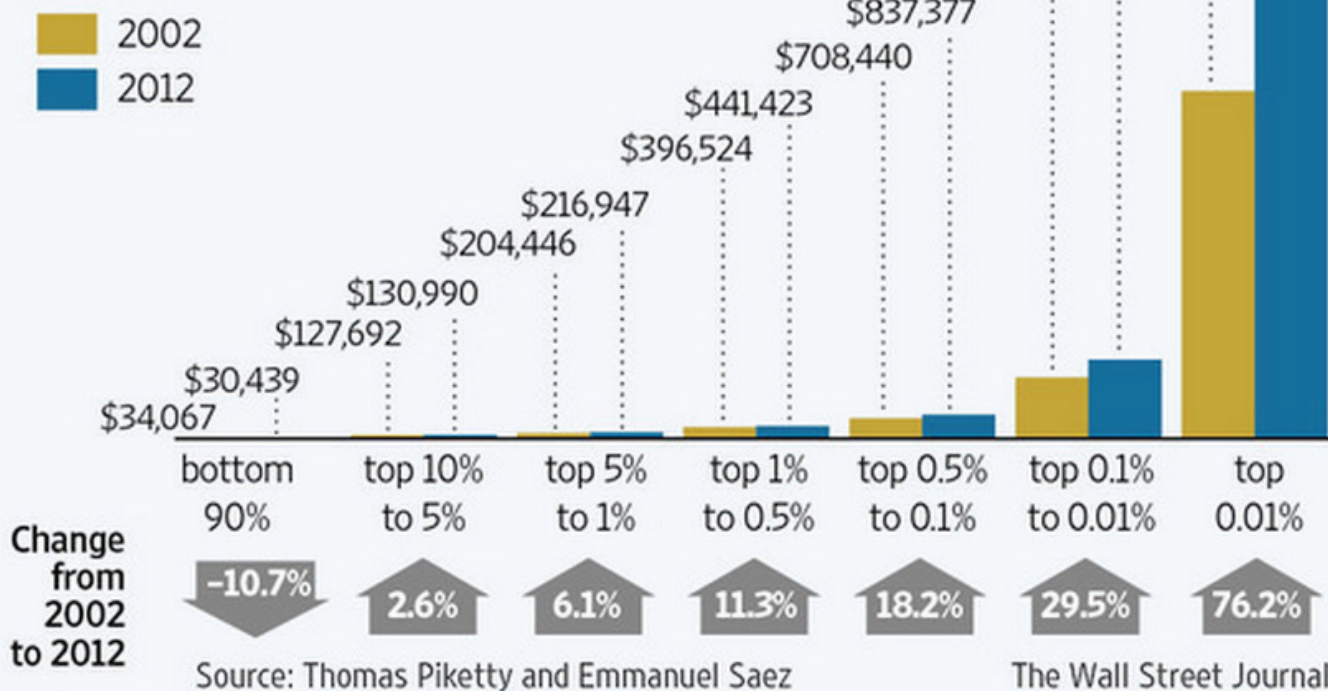
the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning."

Even the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) have got in on the act. It is extraordinary to have these institutions express their concerns at growing inequality when they have operated as the policemen for international capitalism – enforcing the neoliberal "Washington Consensus" – that has contributed so much to creating the inequality in the first place.

An IMF report in September 2012 called Income Inequality and Fiscal Policy confirmed widening inequality. The GINI coefficient (a measure of inequality of income between the top and bottom income earners) in the US jumped from 30.5% in 1980 to 38.6% in 2010, the largest rise in the whole world with the exception of one country, China, where it has risen from a relatively low 28% to a very high 42% during "the move towards the market"

For Richer and Poorer

Average family income, excluding capital gains, adjusted for inflation



in China over the last 30 years.

New Zealand had one of the largest increases going from 27 in 1980 to 34 in 1995 before dropping back slightly to 33 in 2008 – the latest figure available. Only the UK (27 to 34.4) and the USA (30.1 to 36.3) had similar sharp increases over the 1980 to 1995 period. The most equal society in the advanced capitalist world is Norway (24%), which is also the richest. All the Scandinavian ratios are relatively low while Germany and France are in the middle (low 30%).

The reason for all this sudden concern for the growth in inequality is political. The capitalist rulers are concerned that the inequality debate will focus attention on their monopolisation of wealth and power and we may seek ways to curtail it or, even better, end it for good.

The January 5 Christian Science Monitor headed a feature article on the issue: “Income inequality: does wider gap between rich and poor threaten capitalism?” They quote Bill Gross, one of the largest bond managers in the US, saying that the inequality in the USA “can’t go on like this, either from the standpoint of the health of the capitalist system itself or the health of individuals and the family.”

The Wall Street Journal had an article on November 10 headlined, “Worry over inequality occupies Wall Street – gulf between haves and have-nots may hurt economy.” The chart that accompanied the article shows that the average income of the bottom 90% of families actually fell by 10% from 2002-2012 while all the top income groups grew. The top 0.01% saw their incomes grow 76.2 percent to an average of over \$21 million in the same period. And those figures are adjusted for inflation and exclude capital gains.

Journalist Justin Lahart commented: “Even if they have found the widening gulf between America’s haves and have-nots troubling, inequality isn’t something fund

managers have worried about professionally. That may be changing.

“Over the years, the only way inequality has really mattered to investors has been as a factor when considering stocks. If the rich are getting richer, companies that cater to them have better prospects...

“Lately, though, some big investors have worried increasing income and wealth gaps threaten the economy’s ability to expand. They also fret that public anger over it, which Democrat Bill de Blasio tapped in his successful run for New York City mayor, is creating dangerous political tensions.”

Here we get to the real reason the issue of inequality has become in Obama’s words “the defining challenge of our time.”

Big Business fears the issue will be captured by left wing forces independent of them and the parties they control. By giving vent to some of the dissatisfaction through the Democratic Party they hope to keep it contained within acceptable boundaries. Opinion polls are showing a growing desire for a third party alternative in US politics.

In Lorain County, Ohio, 24 councilors were elected in November on a union-backed Independent Labor Party slate against the local Democratic Party machine. The last straw was when the Mayor scabbed on a strike. At this stage, the union campaign is still aimed at putting pressure on the Democratic Party rather than forming a truly “independent” labour party. But the strong vote is a signal of what is possible if a revitalised labour movement were to break from the shackles that have tied it to the Democratic Party for decades – with nothing to show for their loyalty. Kshama Sawant, a very public socialist, was also recently elected to the Seattle City Council. She had broad union and

working class support. Her campaign themes targeted inequality and the need for the labour movement to break with the twin parties of big business in the USA. Her inauguration speech summarised these themes as follows:

“This city has made glittering fortunes for the super wealthy and for the major corporations that dominate Seattle’s landscape. At the same time, the lives of working people, the unemployed and the poor grow more difficult by the day. The cost of housing skyrockets, and education and healthcare become inaccessible.

“This is not unique to Seattle. Shamefully, in this, the richest country in human history, 50 million of our people – one in six – live in poverty. Around the world, billions do not have access to clean water and basic sanitation and children die every day from malnutrition.

“This is the reality of international capitalism. This is the product of the gigantic casino of speculation created by the highway robbers on Wall Street. In this system the market is God, and everything is sacrificed on the altar of profit. Capitalism has failed the 99%.

“Despite recent talk of economic growth, it has only been a recovery for the richest 1%, while the rest of us are falling ever farther behind.

“In our country, Democratic and Republican party politicians alike primarily serve the interests of big business. A completely dysfunctional Congress does manage to agree on one thing – regular increases in their already bloated

Inequality

salaries – yet at the same time allows the federal minimum wage to stagnate and fall farther and farther behind inflation. We have the obscene spectacle of the average corporate CEO getting \$7000 an hour, while the lowest-paid workers are called presumptuous in their demand for just \$15.

“To begin to change all of this, we need organised mass movements of workers and young people, relying on their own independent strength. That is how we won unions, civil rights and LGBTQ rights.”

A major feature of Sawant's campaign was solidarity with the struggle of fast food workers and others to increase their pay and win union rights. A referendum in the city of SeaTac just south of Seattle at the same time as the election approved a raise in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for hospitality and transportation workers in and near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. The current minimum wage in Washington State is \$9.19.

A December 11 Bloomberg poll found that “64 percent of Americans no longer believe the country offers everyone an equal chance to succeed, compared with 33 percent who do.... And for those making \$50,000 or less, 73 percent see the economy stacked against them.”

Another recent poll found that 64% of Americans believe Federal government policies favour the well off. Fifty seven percent thought the government should pursue policies to reduce that gap.

US lawmakers are following

the opposite course. In addition to cutting income support for long-term unemployed, budget cuts kicked into effect November 1 that lowered the nation's average federal food stamp benefit to less than \$1.40 per person per meal. Today, there are a record 48 million Americans dependent on food stamps,

22 million of whom are children.

We need a new social and political movement that tackles inequality. But such a movement has to understand that capitalism and inequality are two sides of the same coin. There can be no lasting attack on inequality without also attacking its source.a

MAKE SEATTLE AFFORDABLE FOR ALL

\$15/hour

MINIMUM WAGE

VOTE

FOR

KSHAMA

SAWANT

FOR SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL POSITION 2

*At a time of budget cuts, Seattle City Council members pay themselves nearly \$120,000 per year. If elected I will only take the average worker's wage and donate the rest to building social movements." - Kshama Sawant

Jobs & Services, Not Corporate Welfare

- ★ A Millionaire's Tax to fund mass transit, education and living-wage union jobs providing vital social services.
- ★ End corporate welfare. Tax freeloading corporations. Reduce the unfair tax burden on small businesses, homeowners & workers.
- ★ Raise the minimum wage to \$15/hr.
- ★ Unions: Amazon, Starbucks & low-paid service workers.
- ★ No layoffs or attacks on public sector unions!

Affordable Housing

- ★ We need rent control!
- ★ End homelessness in Seattle. Fully fund services for the disabled, veterans, seniors, & families in crisis.

Fight Police Brutality & Racism

- ★ Build a mass movement against police brutality & racial profiling. Create an elected civilian review board with full powers over the

Quality Public Schools

- ★ Stop defunding public schools. Lower class sizes. Support Seattle teachers & students boycotting the MAP standardized test.
- ★ Empower students, parents, and teachers to democratically develop culturally relevant curriculum. Expand anti-bullying efforts & curriculum promoting LGBTQ equality, anti-racism, and anti-sexism.

Environmental Sanity

- ★ Put the brakes on the coal trains! Words are not enough - the Council needs to pass an ordinance & organize mass protests to make Seattle coal-free.

Volunteer!

Campaign Office
114 M - 1PM
613 19th Ave. E. 2008
(corner of Mercer & 19th)

Printed by Vote Sawant, P.O. Box 80992, Seattle, WA 98145 / LABOUR DONATED

www.VOTESAWANT.ORG

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

@VoteSawant
/VoteSawant
(206) 486-0099
VoteSawant@gmail.com